

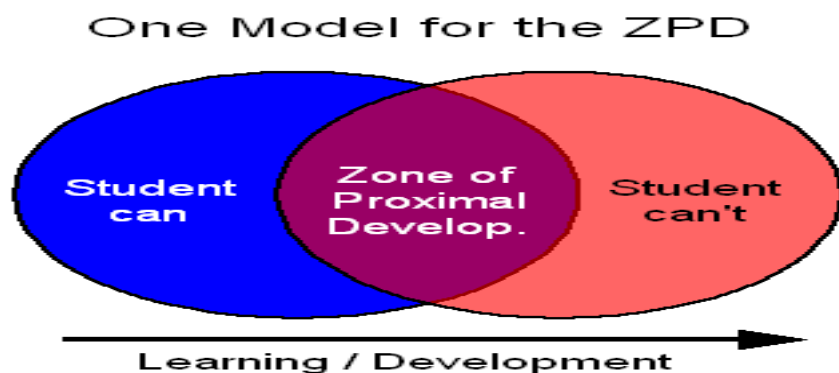
Culture Wars: How can ESL educators help bridge our divisions?



What should the response of ESL educators and managers be in the volatile climate of today's cultural and economic wars? In this session, Paolo Freire and Lev Vygotsky's epistemologies in the context of adult education will be used as a basis for discussing concepts of diversity, integration and assimilation. Strategies for building bridges for individual learning and identity exploration, classroom engagement and school communities will be examined.

- I have used the term “culture wars” deliberately. Should ESL teachers care about bringing social justice into the classroom? In a world increasingly polarized from extreme right to extreme left, is it possible to promote discussions about racial and gender inequity in the classroom? What is your view?
- Everyone, detractors and supporters, are welcome to share their views online. Just click on the link provided at the end of this bullet point. It will take you to a board where there is pink circle with an addition sign on the bottom right hand corner. Just click on the plus sign to add your comment. I look forward to your feedback and value it greatly. All comments are guaranteed anonymity. <https://padlet.com/munjeera123/e1e9ok0pw0qp>

- The Jenner/Pepsi commercial (<https://youtu.be/dA5Yq1DLSmQ>) was criticized for treating social justice issues on a superficial level. As if a can of Pepsi can bring world peace. Not!
- But multicultural activities, even in ESL classrooms, can often remain at the surface and may not address social issues. There can be a tendency to remain at the food, fun and festival level of cross-cultural interactions.
- Deconstructing Western exceptionalism can be accomplished through Indigenizing material on Canada. Discussions on how residential schools affected not just individuals but communities can have relevance for immigrant experiences today.
- English as a Second Language (ESL) students, communities, teachers and administrators alike can be complicit in perpetuating linguistic genocide even with attempts to promote integration.
- Transnationalism can be used to promote a more nuanced understanding of the immigrant experience. ELLs may not leave behind the cultures from the mother country. Instead, long term connections which transcend space across international borders and time through relationship with multi-generational family members are kept throughout an immigrant's lifetime. Remittances sent home are a key part of the immigrant experience. As well, the responsibility for caring for aging parents remains a factor in immigrants' lives who may be well established in the host country. In this way, assimilation and integration models have failed to appreciate the full extent of ethnic ties back home. Immigrant ties to the mother country do not necessarily diminish over time and exist in a third space of social connections consisting of kinship relationships and community ties back home and in the host country.
- Lev Vygotsky used the Zone of Proximal Development to contend that students come to the classroom with a certain amount of knowledge. Teachers have their course outcomes. The space in between in the Zone of Proximal Development is the part teachers are concerned with in terms of student achievement. The "how" of moving students forward is to build on the base and scaffold existing ways of knowing.



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<https://www.withfriendship.com/images/e/24019/Zone-of-proximal-development-wallpaper.jpg>

- Paolo Freire's banking model critiques conventional methods of learning where students are seen as empty vessels where teachers deposit knowledge into learners. Instead, Freire advocates for democratization in the classroom where teachers can also learn from the students through conversation. Freire believes that dialogue is an existential necessity.
- The Heineken commercial advocates conversation as a means of achieving social justice and has been lauded as presenting a more nuanced version using a conversation between a man who is socially conservative and a transgender woman.
- Culture in the classroom can be achieved through global and multicultural education. Global education discusses issues external to a nation while multicultural education discusses problems within a nation. The key is that global issues are not presented in a deficit light while multicultural issues challenge existing structures that perpetuate race and gender stratification.
- The funds of knowledge strategy by Luis Moll refers to the accumulated knowledge in a classroom by individuals and their communities. For example, many ESL classes have doctors, lawyers and engineers. Professional knowledge can be used in the classroom. Also, as people tend to form communities in the host country, it is important to bring community groups and leaders as stakeholders in the school. Strong community relationships can make for strong ESL schools.
- Artifactual literacies, using an object brought from home with cultural significance, can also be used as prompts for speaking and writing.
- Identity exploration on several levels can be useful especially for students dealing with extreme culture shock. Not only should identity be examined on an individual (micro) level but on meso (community) and macro (geopolitical) levels. It is also useful for ELL who may be struggling with changing gender roles in the host country.
- There are several ways to decolonize ESL classrooms. Firstly, materials in textbooks may lack diversity or present cultures in traditional or stereotypical ways. With online access it may be possible to use images that are more reflective of the students sitting in the classroom so that they may see themselves in textual representation. Further research into culturally sensitive practices and assessment is needed. My research will focus on anti-oppressive education management.

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